Resolution on human rights in Russia and the new NGO legislation

2005/2661(RSP) - 15/12/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution **on human rights in Russia and the new NGO legislation** . To recall, on 23 November 2005, Russia's State Duma approved by an overwhelming majority at first reading a draft law, which amends the current legislation on the registration of NGOs. Deep public concern has been expressed both in Russia and internationally over these amendments, which potentially restrict the freedom of association in the Russian Federation.

Parliament underlined the importance of non-governmental organisations to a stable and democratic civil society built not only on principles such as the rule of law and freedom of speech but also on the ability of citizens to associate freely. It therefore expressed great concern about the draft law on amendments to Russian federal legislation on non-profit organisations and public associations and called for the new legislation to be made to comply with the norms and standards of the Council of Europe. It welcomed the Russian Federation's request for the advice of the Council of Europe on the proposed amendments, and fully endorsed the recommendations made by the Council of Europe in its provisional opinion.

Parliament hoped that the Russian legislature would:

- provide a clear definition of unacceptable political activities which may not be financed from foreign sources;
- establish that a decision of a judicial and not a supervisory authority is the only ground for dissolution of NGOs and NPOs;
- choose not to introduce the requirement of permanent residence for non-nationals or the age requirement;
- ensure the right of non-nationals to establish NGOs in Russia and participate in their work;
- ease the proposed powers of supervision exercised by the authorities over NGOs, particularly as regards the requirements of financial accountability for resources supplied by foreign sponsors.

Parliament appealed to the Russian Duma to take the necessary time to review and improve the amendments in the light of the recommendations made in the Presidential review, the Council of Europe's provisional opinion and this Resolution. It called on the incoming Austrian and Finnish Presidencies to raise the issues of respect for democracy and human rights at the next EU-Russia summits, to give the EU-Russia human rights dialogue a more prominent role and to further involve the European Parliament in this process.

Finally, Parliament expressed its concern about the general detention conditions for prisoners and the difficulty of access to lawyers for some of them. According to the Russian Criminal Code detainees should be imprisoned either close to their residence or close to the place where the trial has taken place.